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## **Prosthetic Scenographies: Scenographic Extension of the Senses and Mediation of the Performance Space in *Tower***

In this article I provide an account of how the spectator's senses can be extended and mediated by scenography to argue for an expanded understanding of scenography's affective operation in performance. This is discussed in the context of practice-research project *Tower*, a site-led performance presented in London in 2017 that is performed in a high-rise building and watched from the street through binoculars, with the audience listening to a binaural recording of the performers' movements through headphones. The binaural soundscape and the binoculars are conceived of as mediating prostheses that extend the bodies of the audience to create a mediated sensory proximity that is experienced in disjunction with the physical distance of the performance. Drawing on perspectives on sensory and spatial perception from phenomenology and cognitive science, I analyse my own experience of the work from my dual perspective as creator and spectator. I argue that the sensory disjunction in *Tower* produces an *affective unreality*, which heightens the fictional space of the performance within the real site. I argue that by considering the mediating prostheses as part of the scenography, we open up new ways to think about both mediating technologies and how scenography operates on audiences.

### **Introduction**

Critical discourses of scenography that understand it as an expanded field of practice have led to calls for renewed clarity about what scenography is or could be, and what it does or what it can do in performance (McKinney and Palmer 2017; McKinney 2016b; Aronson 2016). Simultaneously, the rise of new technologies in performance and immersive and site-specific performance practices has opened up new questions about the role of scenography in performance and its relationship with the audience. This article centres on the practice-research project *Tower*, a site-led performance first presented in London in 2017. It is performed in a high-rise building and watched through the windows from a distance by an audience with binoculars. The audience also wear headphones and listen to a pre-recorded binaural soundscape of the performers' movements. I will discuss the use of the binoculars and the headphones as prostheses that extend the senses of the audience and mediate the performance space: the binoculars by extending the body's binocular vision and the binaural sound by extending the body's binaural hearing. Though

notions of mediated performance are not new, I propose that re-conceiving of the mediating technologies as part of a performance's scenography allows us new ways to account for the audience's relation to both scenography and mediated performance. What could this mean for how we understand audience perceptions of scenography and its affective qualities?

The project was devised as an investigation into the relationship between scenography and sensory experiences of urban environments in the context of site-specific performance. Reconceiving of the binoculars and headphones as scenographic prostheses was not initially articulated as part of the research enquiry. Rather, this emerged through the practice-research as it offered new phenomenological insights into the way scenography and the senses interact in performance. As Bleeker et. al. have said:

Performers come across momentary bodily "estrangement" when their bodies are stretched beyond their familiar and routinely practiced limits. The same can be observed of audience members attending performances that push past previous artistic or even societal norms... (Bleeker, Sherman, and Nedelkopoulou 2015, 8)

To demonstrate the insights produced by this 'estrangement', I first contextualise the performance itself, then discuss Marshall McLuhan's conception of all media as prostheses and the context of technological prosthetics in performance and scenography. Next, I will build upon existing research in scenography that defines it according to its materiality, its

relationship to the senses of the spectators, and its affective qualities to argue that prosthetic media worn and used by the audience can also be understood as scenography. Drawing on scientific and phenomenological understandings of sensory perception, I will then provide an account of my own experience of the performance from my dual perspective as creator and spectator, supplemented with the perspectives of other audience members. Finally, I posit that the scenographic extension of the senses disrupts audience members' spatial perception of the performance and in doing so produces what I call an *affective unreality*, which I hope to show is key to understanding how the prostheses operate *as* scenography.

Figure 1

### ***Tower***

Tower was first performed in Elephant & Castle in London in April 2017. Two women appear alone within two separate rooms – and two separate windows – of a high-rise building. Each perform repeated actions of daily domestic life: sleeping, preparing and eating food, cleaning, answering a phone call, dressing, crying, watching television. A small audience of around fifteen people are seated on plastic chairs on a small patch of grass across the road, watching the performance with binoculars and wearing headphones that allow them to select and move back and forth between the soundscape of each room. Both windows are visible at a distance with the naked eye. However looking through the binoculars only allows spectators to see one window at a time, meaning that audience members must make decisions about where to focus their attention both visually and aurally. The patch of grass sits between a busy three-lane road; the Michael Faraday Memorial, which is shaped like a monolithic steel cube; a

pedestrian and cycle crossing; and Elephant & Castle underground station. The positioning of the audience highlights the flows of people and vehicles through the space and heightens the strangeness of the experience, as the grassy area is clearly designed for decoration rather than inhabitation and as such the audience occupies a liminal space. The coloured chairs, the headphones and the binoculars mark them visually as a group. These markers, coupled with the unusual sight of a group people inhabiting that particular patch of grass, render the audience somewhat of a spectacle. As they perform their watching of the performance, people passing on foot and in buses clearly stop to watch the watching audience, trying to work out what they are looking at. The headphones and binoculars are prostheses that function here as both costumes and as props for the audience, forming part of the visual scenography of the performance and underscoring the voyeurism inherent in the act of watching, while also mediating the performance taking place within the windows. By drawing attention to the porous boundaries between public and private space and the multiple and overlapping scales of proximity, intimacy, distance and alienation that exist within the architecture of the city, the aim was to pose questions about the performance of our public and private selves and to celebrate the mundane humanity of daily life. This takes place in the context of a large-scale regeneration of Elephant & Castle that involves removing large quantities of social housing. For the purposes of the present article, I want to focus on the perceptual experience of seeing and hearing the performance through the binoculars and headphones, and how these prostheses contribute to the affective power of the scenography of the performance.

Figure 2

### ***Media as Prostheses/Prostheses in Performance***

Conceptions of media as prostheses originated in Marshall McLuhan's mid-twentieth century book, *Understanding Media*. McLuhan posited that all media is prosthetic, every technology an 'extension of ourselves' that alters our perceptions and relationship with the world (McLuhan 2001). He argued that this extension is necessarily accompanied by an 'autoamputation', which he describes as a physiological response to the extension of a bodily sense in the form of a numbness or 'displacement of perception' (50) as the body attempts to find equilibrium in its extended perception. In his conception, all senses affect one another. The nervous system, unable to endure the 'superstimulation' (46) of a single sense or bodily function, must 'amputate' the sense in question. What might this mean for audiences of mediated performances?

Much has been written about the use of technology in performance and its implications for our embodied subjectivity that could provide models for thinking about the use of prostheses in performance. Mark Hansen argues, in the context of discourses of performance that centre on the body, that new technologies allow us an opportunity to re-examine 'the phenomenal body and its correlation with the environment/world' (2015, 222). Jennifer Parker-Starbuck discusses new forms of engagement emerging from the increased integration of technology and bodies in performance, that serve to 'remind us of the ongoing potentials of refiguring, of transforming, of becoming-cyborg' (2011, 184). While the media apparatus discussed in this article is not particularly new or high-tech, reflecting on how it operates in the context of the scenography of

the performance opens up a space for thinking about prostheses that mediate performance alongside existing discourses of scenography.

Previous discussions of technological prostheses as part of performance scenographies have included: digitally augmented performers (Jernigan et al. 2009); technologies that render absent performers present (Torpey 2012); the use of motion tracking technologies to extend the presence of performers (Kuhn 2007); and the surgical addition of body parts (Clarke 2002). In this article I discuss the notion of prosthetics from the perspective of the audience. Parker-Starbuck does this in her phenomenological analysis of the wearing of 3D glasses as an audience member in George Coates' production, *Invisible Site*. In it she argues that the embodied relationship to the stage image is 'neutralised' (2011, 168) by the glasses-as-prostheses, an effect similar to the binoculars' disruption of the perception of space in *Tower* that I expand upon below. She also echoes McLuhan's notion of autoamputation by describing the disorientation and struggle for equilibrium felt by audiences 'immersed in technologies' (160). However, she does not consider the glasses as part of the scenography of the performance. I want to propose that audience prostheses can be understood as a scenographic element, allowing us to open up discussions of extending audiences' bodies to discourses of scenography. To do this I first examine how notions of mediation sit within current definitions of scenography as an expanded field.

### ***What is Scenography?***

Since Pamela Howard asked this question in her book of the same name (Howard 2002), discourses in the field of scenography have continued to expand understandings of what it is and how it operates in performance. Here I want to foreground definitions that emphasise scenography's materiality, its affects and its sensory apprehension, to make a case for the prosthetic scenography in *Tower*. In Howard's book, Dorita Hannah defines scenography as 'the dynamic role design plays upon the stage, orchestrating the visual and sensory environment of performance' (Howard 2002, xv). Joslin McKinney and Phillip Butterworth focus on 'scenography as an expressive and affective agent of performance' (2009, 5). McKinney's work on audience perceptions of scenography and scenography's inherent materiality has been particularly useful in terms of the way I am thinking about what scenography is and how it works in *Tower*. She argues for a centring of the body in understanding how scenography operates on audiences. In particular, she points out the importance of the interconnectedness of the senses in how we perceive scenography; that beyond the visual and aural senses usually associated with scenography, it is also perceived through 'smell, touch, kinaesthetic sense...and vestibular sense...' (McKinney 2015, 80). McKinney also draws on new materialist ontologies to claim that 'scenography as a material practice insists on the vitality of materials and their capacity to engender reciprocal relationships with spectators' (McKinney 2015, 91), particularly in the context of scenography as an expanded practice. In *Scenography Expanded*, McKinney and Scott Palmer build upon this idea, citing research into the 'agentic capacity of materials' (2017, 12) as one of the key lines of inquiry in current scenographic discourses. Nick Hunt also defines scenography as 'the materiality of performance – the sum total of the



performance space, scenery, costume, lighting, sound, video, and so on...’, but stresses the importance of the effect digital media has had in positing ‘alternative materialities that have sometimes radically disrupted existing scenographic practices, and sometimes perpetuated established practices through new means’ (2010, 3). Kathleen Irwin has identified particularities in the way scenography operates in site-specific performance to draw attention to a site’s ‘sensuous materiality’, and in doing so produces ‘an “excess of meaning” or a heightened state of knowing that extends beyond either a semiotic or a phenomenological reading’ (Irwin 2008, 45). I intend to build on understandings of scenography as materiality and sensory environment, and of its affective power in performance and in particular site-specific performance. To these existing definitions I propose adding the capacity for the materials of scenography to act as mediating prostheses for the audience.

My question is: what does it mean for scenography to mediate the performance and in doing so extend the bodies of the spectators? I want to be clear that what I am discussing here is the mediation of the performance itself and its environment, rather than mediated images that form a part of the scenography. While digital projections are now widely understood as part of the scenography of performance, and the relationship between scenography and technology more broadly has been discussed at length (for example in Baugh 2013; Aronson 2005 and Hunt 2010), the implications of scenographic technologies – digital and analogue – that mediate the sensory perception of the performance, as opposed to forming a part of the scenographic environment, are less often discussed. Chris Wenn undertakes a phenomenology of headphone listening in live

performance, describing headphones as a technological prosthesis that closes off the surrounding environment and creates a 'psychoacoustic space' inside the listener's skull. In addition to being perceived sonically, the prosthesis here is registered haptically as a 'slight, alien pressure of foam, metal and plastic around the head...' (Wenn 2015, 246). Katherine Graham identifies the mediation of the visible as a key function of light in performance. She calls light 'a medium for and a material of performance' (2016, 74), and argues that one of its key modes of operation is not to simply make visible, but to provide a 'mediated visibility' where 'the word "mediated" suggests more comprehensively the action of light, as it can simultaneously select and transform the visible' (76). In these examples, the way we see and hear the physical space and live performers is mediated by the scenography. It follows then that sound and light could already be said to possess the capacity to mediate the space of performance.

While it is not particularly controversial to claim that the headphones and sound are both scenographic and prosthetic, I want to propose here that material objects can also act as *mediating prostheses*. In *Tower*, the binoculars are held in the hands of the audience throughout the performance and perceived through touch. They function as an object in their own right, akin to a prop as well as a costume that is used by the audience rather than by a performer. They form part of the aesthetic of the performance – audience members see each other using them, and the binoculars mark the audience as part of a group while heightening the performativity of the act of watching. They have a material agency, what Jane Bennett calls a '*thing-power*'. *Thing-power* connotes 'the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and manifest traces

of independence or aliveness', in ways which are not entirely reducible to 'the words, images, and feelings they provoke in us' (Bennett 2010, xvi). Bennett's conception of *thing-power* is one of the key theoretical frameworks through which McKinney discusses scenography's materiality, and thus I propose justifies the binoculars' inclusion as part of the scenography of the performance.

However, the binoculars also function to extend the visual perceptual system of the audience and in doing so actively mediate the performance. As a visual prosthesis they operate in tandem with the headphones as auditory prosthesis, thus two sense systems are extended in *Tower*. Following this, through a phenomenological account of how the senses are extended and disrupted by the binoculars and the binaural sound in *Tower*, I aim to show that understanding scenography's capacity to act prosthetically for the audience gives us new ways to account for scenography's operation on the senses and the affects it produces.

### ***Sensing Space***

To understand how the senses are extended and disrupted in *Tower*, I have drawn on perspectives on sensory perception from cognitive psychology and phenomenology. J. J. Gibson contends that our perception is made up of five perceptual systems – the basic orienting system, the auditory system, the haptic system, the taste-smell system and the visual system, arguing that a single sense does not usually correspond to a single sense organ or receptor but that the senses intersect with one another (Gibson 1968). He argues that we perceive kinaesthetically rather than passively; 'the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin are

in fact mobile, exploratory, orienting' (33). These movements can take the form of small, barely perceptible movements of the head, eyes and body.

In the context of this performance, I am most interested in the ability of our bodies and senses to perceive spaces. Our own in-built binocular vision helps us to perceive space, as the separation of the eyes and the resulting angle between the two lines of sight as they meet at a point in space (parallax) is one of the key mechanisms that allows us to perceive depth and see in three dimensions – though there are also monocular cues for depth perception. But as Jennifer Groh points out, when looking at objects very far in the distance (beyond one hundred metres or so), the binocular disparity becomes negligible (due to the distance between the eyes in comparison to the distance to the object) and objects appear flat (Groh 2014). Likewise, the auditory system also plays a role in spatial perception by localising the source of sounds through the '*ear-head system*' (Gibson 1968, 37, 51, *passim*). Like the binocular visual system, hearing is binaural. That is, we are able to spatialise sound through our two ears working 'together with the muscles for orienting them to a source of a sound' (75). Our bodies also move to orient ourselves within a space, Gibson's basic-orienting system or kinaesthetic perception. Gibson acknowledges that there is some collusion of the senses, due to the confusing effect when different senses are given different information, but believes that one sense doesn't in fact need to be validated by another. For example, we do not need to touch something in order to confirm haptically what we can already see. But looking at the senses through the lens of cognitive psychology alone does not fully account for the experiential aspects of perception.

Phenomenological perspectives begin to create understandings of the experience of perceiving, rather than simply the mechanics of perception. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* focuses on embodiment or 'being in the world' as the foundation for perception, and is useful here (2012, 219, 243, *passim*). Merleau-Ponty argues that all senses are by definition spatial. Like Gibson, he emphasises embodied movement as an important aspect of perception. Unlike Gibson, he stresses the importance of the unity of the senses in making sense of space, arguing that our senses merge in ways that make it impossible to completely isolate the operation of one sense in the perception of a space. His conception of how the senses work together to create space is that 'each sensation gives us a particular manner of being in space and, in a certain sense, of creating space' and that 'each sense constitutes a small world within the larger one, and it is even because of its particularity that it is necessary to the whole and that each sensation opens onto the whole' (230). In other words, the unity of the senses is vital for the perception of a unified space. Merleau-Ponty discusses the example of Aristotle's illusion – the perceptual trick whereby two fingers of the one hand are crossed over one another and a single small object is used to touch the space in between the fingers while the subject's eyes are closed. In this situation, the hand perceives two objects when only one is present. Merleau-Ponty posits that the reason for this is that the sensations of the fingers are inverted, creating a 'disturbance of the body schema' (211). He calls this disturbance an 'experimental upheaval'. I propose that in *Tower*, the extensions of the audience's senses create such an *experimental upheaval* by providing

conflicting sensory cues, and that this upheaval could be deliberately created in aid of productive scenographic affect.

### ***Perception Through and of Scenography In Tower***

#### Figure 3

The following is a phenomenological account of using the prostheses to see and hear the performance. The first time I experienced the performance through these prostheses, I experienced a sensation of bodily estrangement. The following analysis is based largely on my own experience of this estrangement, from my dual perspective as both creator and spectator. Audiences were asked to reflect in writing upon their experience following the performance, and some of these perspectives have also been included here. Acknowledging the subjectivity of audience experience, I have used these audience reflections to supplement my understanding and theoretical analysis of my own experience by pointing to instances of shared experience, rather than attempting to posit a universal experience of the performance.

The binoculars and headphones mediate the performance and extend the sensory capabilities of the audience. While McLuhan contends that all forms of media are prosthetic, in *Tower* the extension of the body is explicit: the visual and auditory perceptual systems are augmented. The binoculars are prosthetic in a quite straightforward way. They literally extend the capabilities of our eyes by magnifying them. The wireless headphones are worn on the body and felt on the skin. Though the headphones are a digital technology whereas the binoculars

are analogue, both objects can be understood to mediate the performance and its environment.

To focus on the visual media in *Tower*, the binoculars mediate the performance, however this operates not simply as mediation *of* the performance. The binoculars are part of the performance and its scenography, a material object or a prop used by the audience rather than the performers. I apprehend them visually, hold them in my hand, feel them brush against the skin of my face as I use them: they alter the visuality of the performance and are themselves perceived visually and haptically. As described above, they possess their own *thing-power* as part of the performance's materiality. While my awareness of them shifts while I use them, they never fully recede from my conscious perception. Merleau-Ponty discusses the way bodily appendages become, through habit, assimilated into our sense of self and our body's position in space, using the examples of hats, cars and canes used by people with visual impairments. 'Places in space are not defined as objective positions in relation to the objective position of our body, but rather they inscribe around us the variable reach of our intentions and our gestures' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 144). Perhaps it is the fact that I am not habituated to using binoculars that means using them remains slightly uncomfortable. Looking through the binoculars means that only one window is visible at a time, so there is a continual refocusing of attention that occurs throughout the performance, further contributing to the ongoing awareness of the binoculars. A number of surveyed audience members commented on this act of choosing where to look, with one respondent articulating that it 'highlighted the sense of observing for me'. The

visual sense is extended by the binoculars in that the audience is taken closer to the performance. Yet this extension is experienced *as* mediated – the magnified view of the performance appears somewhat unreal, and this also heightens my consciousness of the fact that I am not looking straight at the performance. Watching through the binoculars produces a strange sensation; akin, in my experience, to wearing virtual reality goggles in the out-of-place experience of visually perceiving the imagined space whilst your body continues to perceive the real space. However, unlike virtual reality the binoculars don't take us to a simulated space, but transport us closer to a real space we can see, unmediated, in the distance.

The experience of seeing the performance through the binoculars transforms the visual perception of it in two ways. One is the splitting of the image into the two lenses of the binoculars. If they are focused correctly, the visual field begins to converge. However, with the cheap binoculars used for the performance the image flickers and splits, always on the verge of separating, rendering it unstable. The second is the awareness of the magnifying lens between the eye and the image (in addition to the glass of the window). The magnification extends my seeing capacities and brings me visually closer to the performance, yet there is a strangeness to the image caused by both the magnification and by the impression that the lens itself creates a kind of 'film' over what I am seeing. The effect is to lend a slight 'flatness' to the image. This could be accounted for by the distance of the performance and the negligible separation of the eyes relative to this distance, making apprehension of three-dimensionality difficult. As mentioned before, there are also monocular cues for depth perception, and the



spatial perception is not so compromised that we cannot apprehend the figure in front of the background within the window. However, the fullness of the figure and its environment is reduced. Beyond binocular cues, this is also partially explained by the aperture that filters the light through the binoculars. David Katz describes the phenomenon of reduced colour and light information when looking through small viewing apertures, calling what we see through such an aperture 'film colour' as opposed to 'surface colour', which is what we would see if we were looking directly at light reflected off a surface (1935). Without enough light to provide colour, contrast and definition the image lacks depth. It is still perceived as somewhat three-dimensional, but complete spatial perception of the performance environment is not possible. It is not only this lack of depth, however, that renders the image strange or unreal.

Gibson discusses the 'stability and unboundedness' of what he calls the 'visual world'. By this he means that when you turn or tilt your head or body, the world around you does not seem to turn or tilt, nor it is bounded by a 'circular or oval frame'. The 'phenomenal world seems to stay put, to remain upright, and to surround one completely' (Gibson 1968, 253). Yet it is precisely this stability and unboundedness that the visual field, seen through the binoculars, lacks. If I keep the binoculars to my eye and move my arms or body, the sensation is not that of simply scanning the environment, but a queasy feeling that I myself am moving. As one audience respondent put it, 'there was a sensation of feeling a bit motion-sick'. Even small unintentional movements produce this effect. The image is clearly bounded by the two circular frames that converge to create the visual field. And the phenomenal world, seen through the binoculars, does not

surround me, as the binoculars cut off the possibility for peripheral vision. Like McLuhan's notion of autoamputation, the capacity of the visual sense is both extended and reduced by the binoculars as the usual ability for peripheral vision and scanning of my surroundings is thwarted. As has been shown earlier, the senses work kinaesthetically rather than passively; using the binoculars doesn't allow for the small compensatory movements of the head and body that would usually occur when visual and kinaesthetic perception are simultaneous. When using the binoculars, I can only view the space framed by its lenses. I do not see the performance as crisply and clearly as if we were in the room, so there is a conscious awareness of my perception being extended. Accustomed as I am to screen-based digital media, the analogue screen is experienced differently, an image that doesn't quite seem real in comparison to the high definition screen images that I'm exposed to on a daily basis. Yet I know it is in fact real, as if I remove the binoculars I can see the performance taking place at a distance.

The headphones operate slightly differently as a prosthesis. They are also perceived haptically, however unlike the binoculars, headphone wearing is habitual (for me at least, and it might be reasonable to assume that it is habitual for much of the audience, though some bird watchers might also find binoculars habitual). After an initial adjustment period, they become assimilated as an extension of myself, although the ability to change channels between the two soundscapes via a switch behind the left ear disrupts this somewhat. As with the binoculars, many audience members mentioned the effect the changing of channels had on the refocusing of their attention and the experience in general, with one person describing it thus: 'I was very conscious about making decisions

on what I chose to focus on...awareness was heightened throughout, and I felt the effort required quite keenly'. The headphones played pre-recorded sound that was recorded binaurally in the performance space, and the performers synchronised their movements to this sound. Using pre-recorded rather than live sound was a pragmatic and budgetary decision, though none of the surveyed audience members had realised that the sound wasn't live during the performance. Binaural recording techniques mimic our own '*ear-head*' (Gibson 1968) system, usually by placing microphones inside a dummy head. The effect is that the sound, when played back, is registered spatially, with a sense of direction and relative distance of sound sources. Like our binocular visual system, our body's auditory system works binaurally (through two ears) to localise sounds in space. One participant described the extension of the aural as making them feel 'superhuman' in that they 'could hear their in-important [sic] little world from a distance'. However, as with the visual system, kinaesthetic perception is important for 'orienting to sounds' (Gibson 1968); movement allows us to turn our ears and head towards the source of a sound. Here again, this kinaesthetic perception is thwarted, as with the visual sense; while listening I have to fight the instinct to turn my head towards a sound that I know is not physically present in the same space as me.

Wenn discusses how headphone listening thwarts spatial perception. Due to the difference between the speed of sound and light, there is a 'perceptual gap' between, for example, seeing a person speak and hearing the sound, that provides us with information about the distance of a sound source. The use of headphones to transmit sound in live performance erases this gap. (Wenn 2015,

242). In *Tower*, with the performers synchronising their movements with the sound rather than the sound emanating organically from the action, the relationship between image and sound is out of synch, affecting spatial perception. It also means the headphones act as not only a spatial bodily extension but also as a temporal one. What the audience actually hears is pre-recorded at a time in the past. If the performer reacts to the sound rather than anticipating it we actually hear the sound a fraction of a second before we see the movement, creating an extension in time as well as space. Interestingly, this temporal extension was not consciously registered by the audience – as explained above the surveyed audience were surprised to discover the sound wasn't live. As I hope to show, though the sensing body attempts to make sense of the temporal extension, the unconscious perceptual shift it produces nonetheless contributes to the *experimental upheaval* experienced during the performance.

The way the senses intersect is most important for how the *experimental upheaval* is produced in *Tower*, due to the conflicting cues given by different sensory systems. Visually, I am extended towards the space of the performance, but always outside of it. Aurally, I am placed inside the room with the performer, though full aural-spatial perception is not possible due to the inability to kinaesthetically orient towards the sound sources. Haptically, I feel my embodied presence outside on the street. Though the headphones cut me off from the auditory world of my surroundings, I feel the movement of air on my skin with the passing traffic. Though my visual attention is focused elsewhere, I can see my environment, and perceive the distance from which I am viewing the

performance. Thus, the unity of the senses is disrupted and the *whole* of the space of the performance is constituted perceptually as conflicting parts. Words used by audience members to describe this experience included 'strange', 'jarring' and 'disorientating' – the latter used by two respondents. I am calling this disunity of the senses a *sensory disjunction*. Merleau-Ponty argued that to perceive a space, our senses:

must all open onto the same space, otherwise the sensory beings with which they put us into communication would only exist for the relevant sense – like phantoms that only appear at night – they would be missing the fullness of being and we could not genuinely be aware of them, that is, posit them as true beings. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 225)

This conception of incomplete perception as 'phantoms' could be considered together with Bleeker et. al.'s notion of the bodily estrangement produced in audiences of performance practices that go beyond the norm, as a useful way of thinking about the affect produced by the scenographic prostheses. I posit that this could be thought of as an *affective unreality*.

### ***Affective Unreality***

Current debates in scenography have expanded beyond *what* scenography is to encompass *how* it operates, and in *Tower* this *how* is key to understanding the prostheses operation *as* scenography. McKinney, following Svoboda, argues that analysing 'how [scenography] happens to us' is fundamental to its

understanding, and that ‘scenography happens when an audience member experiences some kind of imaginative engagement with the design’ (McKinney 2016a, 69). This is what she elsewhere terms a ‘scenographic exchange’ (McKinney 2012, 222, 225, *passim*). Gibson describes a series of experiments where the environmental information is inadequate for a subject to perceive a space accurately, for example experiments where subjects have had visual and auditory sensory input removed by being placed into silent, darkened rooms. In response to a lack of sensory input, people start to hallucinate, leading Gibson to the conclusion that, when faced with inadequate information or conflicting information, ‘the perceptual system *hunts*. It tries to find meaning, to make sense from what little information it can get’ (Gibson 1968, 303). This explains why audiences assumed the sound was live despite the temporal impossibility of this (and the fact that the performers were not always completely in time with their respective soundscapes), as the perceptual system attempted to make sense of what it was seeing and hearing by assuming the same source for both phenomena. It is also reminiscent of McKinney’s analysis of how audiences assimilate scenographic images and sensory phenomena to construct meaning within their own imaginations (McKinney 2005) and her understanding of the visceral and relational properties of scenography (McKinney 2015). I would like to suggest that the visceral and relational process of scenography could be understood as affect. McKinney and Palmer identify affectivity as a key concept for understanding how scenography acts on the audience (2017, 8). Following this, we might then begin to talk about producing affect through a deliberate scenographic disruption of the senses.

Brian Massumi defines affect as intensity: a 'state of suspense, potentially of disruption', that is 'filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation' (Massumi 1995, 86). In the context of works of art, Erin Manning describes affect as 'what makes a work work', or 'the question of how an artwork evolves to exceed its form, to create from its force-of-form' (Manning 2013, 101). For Massumi, affect is autonomous and it occurs on a pre-conscious level. Discussing a series of experiments where half a second duration was recorded between the brain activity associated with a bodily action and the action's completion, or between a stimulus being applied and felt, Massumi describes the unconscious half second as 'overfull, in excess of the actually performed action and of its ascribed meaning' (Massumi 1995, 90). This unconscious intensity is then perceived, retrospectively, as, for example, emotion, which Massumi calls 'intensity owned and recognised' (88). Likewise, Francisco Varela describes a '*window of simultaneity*' whereby stimuli to different sense systems are incorporated into a perceptual whole (Varela 1999, 272). He discusses how that window can be made apparent through the example of a Necker cube, a wireframe drawing of a cube that produces an optical illusion by allowing two possible interpretations of its spatial perspective. Varela discusses the perceptible temporal 'shift' that occurs when a viewer reverses her or his perspective on the cube, arguing that this shift 'has in itself a very complex dynamic that takes on a "life" of its own' (270). Could it then be argued that this perceptual shift makes affect perceptible, and that this is akin to what the sensory disjunction does in *Tower*?

Writings on the relationship between affect and technologies provide a context for discussing what the sensory disjunction does to the body. Patricia Clough

discusses affect in the context of ‘technologies that are allowing us both to “see” affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body’s organic-physiological constraints’ (Clough 2007, 2). She later expands upon this, contending that affect is useful for thinking through what she calls ‘the biomediated body’, a term she uses to connote the new body created by technologies that enable ‘a profound technical expansion of the senses’ (Clough 2010, 207). Susan Broadhurst makes a similar case specifically within a performance context. Following Gilles Deleuze, she proposes that:

due to the hybridisation of the performances and the diversity of media employed, various intensities are at play. It is these imperceptible intensities, together with their ontological status, that give rise to new modes of perception or consciousness. (Broadhurst 2007, 5)

It is my contention that this is precisely what the scenographic prostheses in *Tower* do. Massumi states that affect, by definition, operates synaesthetically. (Massumi 1995, 96). He also writes specifically about the affective power of interruption (102). I think this speaks to how the sensory disjunction produces affect in *Tower*. A perceptual shift occurs as the body attempts to assimilate both conscious (looking through the binoculars) and unconscious (the aural temporal extension) sensory disruptions and the inability to create a unified perception of the performance space. I have explained above how the performance space is rendered unreal through this inability, which I contend is the direct result of perception attempting to incorporate the sensory extension and disruption, akin to McLuhan’s autoamputation. In discussing this process, McLuhan posits that



'when so amputated, each organ becomes a closed system of great new intensity' (McLuhan 2001, 50). The inherent strangeness of the voyeurism of watching such intimate and mundane moments from such a distance is perhaps heightened by the affective intensity produced by the sensory disjunction - one audience member described the effect of using the prostheses as 'alienating/intensifying'. I propose that the sensory disjunction is the means by which what Manning calls its force-of-form occurs, or what McKinney calls the scenographic exchange, which I argue could be different ways of describing the same phenomenon in the context of scenography. Equally it could be called the production of the excess of meaning, which Irwin has identified as one of the key functions of scenography in site specific performance. This happens in *Tower* through the *affective unreality* that heightens the fictional space of the performance, and has implications for how we conceive of mediating technologies within and in relationship to the affectivity of scenography.

## **Conclusion**

The insights offered by *Tower* reveal the capacity of scenography to act prosthetically to extend the bodies of the audience and mediate the space of the performance. Understanding some performance technologies as prostheses for the audience creates an expanded space for considering scenography's apprehension by the senses and its affects. The expansion of the senses by mediating technologies means that the usual unity of sense perception is inherently compromised, which has profound implications for how we understand the spatial and sensory experience of scenography, or how scenography can act on the body of the spectator. Deliberate scenographic

confusion of the senses is not new, for example the use of gauze, haze or low light to obscure the visual is commonplace. What is significant here is that the scenography is not just operating on the level of the perceived object or space, but directly intervening into the sensing body itself. Deliberate interventions into the senses could be employed by such technologies in order to create affective environments for performance, particularly in site-led forms of performance.

These affective environments are not simply already existing spaces which the audience perceives, rather they are actively constituted by the extended body of the spectator. While I agree with McKinney that audiences always experience scenography with their entire bodies, and that audiences participate in a scenographic exchange at the moment that the scenography begins to 'work' on them, scenographic prostheses that reconfigure the environment of the performance point to an even more active bodily interaction with scenography. This goes beyond existing understandings of performances where embodied engagement with scenography is explicitly underscored, for example in immersive theatre where the audience is free to move around a space. Though neither of the technologies discussed here are particularly new, this clearly has implications for other mediating technologies, particularly as these technologies are becoming more ubiquitous in performance.

Further technological developments will continue to open up new mediated experiences of performance, where the objects or interfaces that mediate might also be considered a part of the scenography of the performance. Current examples of this that spring to mind include lighting design, smartphones and

virtual reality. Considering prosthetic mediation as scenography allows us to expand the ways we account for *what scenography is* and *how it operates* in performance. In addition to considering how scenography operates on the senses as it is perceived in performance, we must also now consider the ways in which scenography could alter and extend the perceiving body itself to create affective experiences.

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